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# “It Was Like Really Uncomfortable But Kind of Comfortable”: An Ethnographically-Informed Radio Play of Adult ESL Classes with Educational Drama

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## Section II: Weaving Community: Learning with Each Other

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### **“It Was Like Really Uncomfortable But Kind of Comfortable”: An Ethnographically-Informed Radio Play of Adult ESL Classes with Educational Drama**

*Won Kim, University of British Columbia*

#### **Abstract**

This chapter explores possibilities and challenges of educational drama-based second language instruction for adult emergent bilingual learners. A part of the key findings from an ethnographic multiple case study of four adult ESL classes with educational drama in Canada will be represented, using playwriting as a means to uncover diverse nuanced insights and reflexive understandings of the phenomenon under investigation. The primary purpose of this ethnographically-informed radio play script is to serve as reflexive, dynamic, and artistic expressions that speak (about and to) students' voices concerning their learning experiences in the course as heard/felt/perceived by the researcher as a participant observer-listener. Another central purpose is to bring to light potential pedagogic challenges of integrating artistic, contextual, and multimodal educational drama for more enriched and empowering learning journeys of adult emergent bilingual learners in ways that can reach out to wider audiences in a more engaging and accessible manner.

**Keywords:** educational drama, L2 pedagogy, classroom-based research, ethnodrama, participant listening, student voices, radio drama, adult emergent multilinguals, case study, reflexivity

#### **Introduction**

In accord with the continued development of and move towards more socially-attuned and contextually-situated second language (L2) pedagogies (Atkinson, 2011; Duff, 2014; Johnson, 2004), there has been a steady pedagogical/scholarly interest in aesthetic, creative, and improvisational educational drama as a means for creating more empowering learning spaces for emergent bilingual learners (Berriz, Wager, & Poey, forthcoming; Even, 2008, 2011; Kao & O'Neill, 1998; Piazzoli, 2011; Roman & Nunez, 2015; Schewe, 2013; Stinson, 2009; Wagner, 1998; Winston, 2004, 2011). These scholars share a strong conviction that educational drama can significantly contribute to supporting educational contexts where emergent bilingual learners have dynamic and creative opportunities to develop their expertise in an L2 as they “actively imagine and process information through the use of language and other symbolic forms”

(Baldwin & Fleming, 2003, p. 33). Nevertheless, there is little empirical evidence concerning what is actually taking place in L2 classrooms and how students' language learning is impacted when drama is introduced. More classroom-based studies are needed to deepen our understanding of how using educational drama affects teaching/learning for emergent bilinguals (Belliveau & Kim, 2013; DICE, 2010; Even, 2008; Nawi, 2014; Stinson & Winston, 2011; Wager, Belliveau, Beck, & Lea, 2009).

This chapter is an effort to contribute to the growing scholarly and pedagogical discussion on the topic of drama and L2 learning for emergent bilinguals. Empirically-grounded findings represented in this chapter stem from an ethnographic multi-case study design to document and explore four drama-based classes for adult emergent bilingual learners in Canada. The study aims to provide richer, nuanced, multi-layered, and self-reflexive autoethnographic auditory accounts of lived experiences of participants in the focal classes as heard, felt, and interpreted by the researcher (as a differently-abled multilingual ethnographer with visual challenge) taking on a “participant listener orientation” (Kim, 2016).

This chapter addresses how drama-based pedagogy for L2 learning is perceived and described by the students in the focal classes. Playwriting has been adopted as a representational approach, considering the unique merits of playwriting in exploring, evocatively representing, complicating, and speaking to research findings (Belliveau, 2015; Ellis, 1997, 2004; Goldstein, 2000; Richardson, 2000). Specifically, concomitant with the participant listener orientation sustained throughout my qualitative inquiry, I have adopted a medium of radio drama, which is more auditorily-oriented. This fictional yet ethnographically-informed radio-drama play can be read and heard as a dramatic and evocative representation of students' reactions to what they experienced in the classrooms with educational drama. This play script also sheds light on pedagogical issues and tensions that were audibly and affectively evident in all the classes. In the remainder of the chapter, the entire play script will be presented after discussing playwriting as a methodological approach.

## **Playwriting in Ethnography**

There has been a methodological effort by a number of qualitative researchers to integrate playwriting with ethnographic research: performance ethnography (Denzin, 2003; Goldstein, 2000, 2002, 2008, 2012), ethnodrama (Mieniczakowski, 2001; Saldaña, 2011; Sallis, 2010), and performed research (Ackroyd & O'Toole, 2010; Belliveau & Lea, 2011). Playwriting is recognized by its “artistic rigor and representational power” (Saldaña, 2003, p. 229) in that it offers a unique understanding that is different from that of a conventional representation of qualitative research findings. Many scholars echo the power of dramatic ways of analyzing and representing insights from qualitative research (Belliveau, 2004, 2006, 2014; Ellsworth, 2005; Fels & Belliveau, 2008; Goldstein, 2000, 2002, 2012; Goodall, 2000; Mieniczakowski, 1995, 2001; Saldaña, 2003, 2011; Wager, 2014). In particular, Goldstein's (2000) performed ethnography for anti-racist teacher education with multilingual students underscores how

ethnodrama speaks to research findings and participants in specific ways rather than simply speaking at them. Goldstein (2000) further illustrates the unique affordances of playwriting as a representational approach as it allows an ethnographer to 1) ponder the “ethnographic authority” (Clifford as cited in Goldstein, 2000, p. 316) of the conventional realist’s representation of one’s research, given the inherently interpretive and subjective nature of ethnography; 2) present research participants in a more nuanced way rather than in a fixed, stereo-typical way from a perspective of constructionism towards a social phenomenon; 3) with its performative nature, expand and display diverse dimensions of the identities of characters or research participants initially composed solely by an ethnographer; 4) strengthen, revisit, and further the validity and trustworthiness of one’s ethnographic work after each performance by attending to reactions and responses from research participants and audiences to the performed version of the work; 5) present both spoken and unspoken meanings of words, silence, and actions of characters/research participants in a specific way that is not often possible in conventional ethnographic written texts; and 6) reach larger audiences in a more personal, persuasive, and immediate way.

With these unique merits of playwriting in view, the present ethnographically-informed radio drama play script has been produced for two main purposes: 1) to offer a reflexive, dynamic, and artistic expression that speaks (about and to) students’ voices concerning their learning experiences in the course as heard/felt/perceived by the researcher as a participant listener and 2) to bring to light potential pedagogic possibilities and challenges of drama-based L2 instruction in ways that can reach out to a wider range of audiences in a more engaging and accessible manner.

### **Ethnographically-informed playwriting process.**

With the above purposes in view, in composing this play script, I carefully, reflexively, and reflectively attended to students’ accounts regarding their experiences in the classes, narrated in face-to-face interviews and e-mail survey questionnaires. Specifically, I have listened closely to the relevant research data that related to pedagogical issues, students’ resistance, and their reactions towards L2 learning through drama. As I considered these relevant data, I selected a few moments of what could be regarded as tensions that arose and resonated from the research data (Mackenzie & Belliveau, 2011). The research data that speaks to such moments of tension evident within/among some individual students and in/about the class (including the closure of the drama course in the institution) and the key findings concerning students’ self-described perceptions of their learning experiences were then transformed into a dramatic dialogue as part of the play script.

In writing up a scripted radio drama play, I kept the actual research participants as characters (but used pseudonyms for their anonymity). While the plot is fictional, although the news about the closure of the drama-based course in the play was ethnographically informed, the dialogue closely reflects the perceptions of a majority of students and teachers towards drama-based ESL classes as described and represented in the data. The majority of the dialogue is

verbatim based. Especially, this was the case for the students' lines, that have retained some linguistic errors, with an aim to better represent their nuanced accounts. The term "ethnographically informed" is used here to indicate how the overall plot was fictional except for the part about the closure of the drama class and how the dialogue (or script) was based on the actual data on how the students perceived and described what they had experienced in the class.

While creating this radio play script, I was continually reminded of the goal to deliver artfully researched content in an engaging way that holds moments of dramatic and artistic awe, sustains reflexivity, and expands a chain of gifting received via data (Belliveau, 2014). Importantly, inspired by Goldstein's (2012) work, I also endeavored to keep in mind Richardson's (2000) criteria for creative analytic practice in an effort to produce an "aesthetically sound, intellectually rich, and emotionally evocative" play (Saldaña, 2003, p. 219). Careful consideration of these criteria in creative endeavours was also important because it could likely enhance its rigor as a qualitative inquiry (Duncan, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2002, 2006; Holt, 2003). Richardson's criteria include:

(a) Substantive contribution. Does the piece contribute to our understanding of social life? (b) Aesthetic merit. Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfyingly complex, and not boring? (c) Reflexivity. How did the author come to write this text? How has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text? (d) Impact. Does this affect me emotionally and/or intellectually? Does it generate new questions or move me to action? (e) Expresses a reality. Does this text embody a fleshed out sense of lived experience? (pp. 15-16)

In addition to the criteria discussed above, throughout the process of choosing data to be transformed into dialogue for my radio drama, I have also considered the following questions (Mackenzie & Belliveau, 2011): what moments arose and resonated from the research data?; does the dialogue carry action?; does the dialogue suggest character?; does the dialogue contain the elements of themes?; does the dialogue capture the essence or spirit of what may be in the research data?; does the play achieve artistic integrity while being grounded in the research data?

As Saldaña (2003) argues, a successful ethnodrama can be entertaining and informative. It invites readers and audiences to be not just observers but also participants who take part in the affective process of grappling with conflicts or issues (Goldstein, 2000). It is my hope that the ethnodrama represented here can engage readers and audiences of this story in an entertaining and informative way and invite them to participate in thinking about pedagogical issues that might also challenge them in their own drama-based classrooms for emergent bilinguals. With such hopes, the remainder of the chapter will present and end with the play script, inviting the readers to be observers of and participants in exploring possibilities and challenges of drama-based ESL classes for adult emergent bilinguals.

## **It Was Really Uncomfortable but Kind of Comfortable: An Ethnographically-Informed Radio Play of an Adult ESL Class with Educational Drama**

### **Characters:**

- Ben, Kevin, Sara, Sharon, Yuki, Mary, Miyuki, Yuna, Naka, Maggie, Sally, David, Ben, Joe, Mimi, Amy, Eva, Nari, Steve, Sam, Helen, Maki, Hemi, Esther, Jane, Michael, Morrie, Momo, Kona, Juna, Lexi, all emergent bilingual adult learners
- Nancy and Nick, two drama-based English language teachers
- Won Kim, the researcher
- Conference audience member

### **ACT I: THE NEWS**

#### **SCENE 1: Conference Presentation Room**

*(In the midst of noise in the audience, the researcher, Won Kim, stands in front of the conference room to begin a presentation. Won checks his talking watch for time to begin his talk.)*

**Won:** *(after a deep breath and with a confident smile)* Thank you everyone for coming to this talk entitled “It Was Really Uncomfortable but Kind of Comfortable: An Ethnographically-Informed Radio Play of an Adult ESL Class with Educational Drama.” I hope that this radio drama play will be heard as a version of the soundscape of the vibrant voices and lived experiences of the students and teachers I have heard and experienced as a participant listener in English language classrooms with educational drama. What will unfold in and through this ethnodrama is a story about multiple sections of one drama-based course that seem to have significance in diverse ways for hundreds of emergent bilingual adult learners and the two teachers, Nancy and Nick, in their L2 educational journeys. The play captures some of the voices of the teachers and students as they react to their experiences with the course, which might be discontinued

after more than 25 years. (*After a brief pause, he looks around the audience*). So, I now invite you to close your eyes, but make sure to keep your ears wide open to listen.

## **SCENE 2: The Classroom**

(*Nancy and the students stand in a circle, facing one another in the center space of the classroom.*)

**Nancy:** (*with a proud smile*) Wow, it's already been 16 weeks. Whew, it's hard to believe how fast the term flew by. You are all now 16 weeks older than before. Ben, you definitely look older (*laughs*).

(*scattered grins around the circle of the students*)

**Nancy:** It's been a great time with you all. I won't forget the imaginative dramatic worlds we've entered together over the term. Before we say goodbye, could I ask you guys to stretch your imagination (*pauses and looks around the students*) one last time? Yesterday, I asked you to write a short letter to your future self, yourself in 10 years from now. (*looks around and finds Kevin, smiling*) Shall we begin with Kevin? Can we hear your letter, Kevin?

**Kevin:** Sure. (*clears his throat*) Humm. Here's my letter.

(*all attend to Kevin, wondering*)

**Kevin:** Hi Kevin, I heard that you have become a business man traveling all around the world. I am proud of you because I know how much you didn't like studying English, not until you took that drama class in Canada. You told me you came to like to learn English for the first time with that class. Now you are communicating with the world in English as a business man. Well done!

**Students:** (*smile and clap*)

**Sara:** Hi Sara, It has been 10 years since I saw you in the drama class in Canada. You wanted to learn English to get closer to your dream. You always want to be a volunteer to help children. You wanted to join an international volunteer group after you had been

to China and Indonesia and seen many people in need. You wanted to do something to help them. You have made your dream come true.

**Sharon:** *(smiles shyly and reads her letter)* Dear Sharon, today I just read a book translated by you from English. You made it! I was so impressed when I saw your name printed on the book. I am very happy for you as I know how much you wanted to become a translator of English and Japanese or Korean. When you were studying English in Canada, you often told me that you would want to speak fluently like native speakers and translate written work. I don't know whether you've now become like a native speaker, but perhaps it doesn't really matter. You should be proud of your name printed on the book as a translator.

**Nancy:** Lovely! Anybody else? *(finds Yuki, looking down shyly, and gently asks her)* Yuki, can we hear your letter?

*(Yuki hesitates, then shyly lifts her head up)*

**Nancy:** *(gently)* Yuki?

**Yuki:** Okay. *(after a deep breath, starts reading her letter in a small yet cheerful voice)* Hello, Yuki, you must be now 50 years old. We met 10 years ago when you came to Canada to study English. I remember you were very stressed and down at that time. You told me how much you once wanted to become an actress when you finished your high school, but you dropped the dream down. You told me that you felt tired from busy and complex relationships your life had brought to you in Japan and left for Canada for studying English. In your quiet and gentle voice, you talked about your new dream of becoming an English teacher for children in Japan. At that moment, I remember how young you sounded. You sounded like a 20 year old with full of hope. I remember how much you tried to break your shyness and get out of the nest you were in. You wanted to be part of every moment of the class even if I couldn't hear your shy voice all the time. I remember your laughter after finishing your acting in front of the whole class. I remember when you humbly said you were inspired by your younger classmates going for their dreams. You said you promised to yourself that you'd think about your future again more seriously. You did it. You did keep your promise to yourself. I heard that



now you are teaching English to kids in Japan. You made it. I am very proud of you, Yuki.

*(Nancy and the students remain in brief pause. Then, a few students start clapping, smiling, and warmly patting Yuki on the back)*

### **SCENE 3: School Hallway**

*(The teacher, Nancy, stands in front of the meeting room with her face down. The other drama teacher, Nick, walks to her, looking concerned.)*

**Nick:** *(concerned)* How did it go?

*(Nancy looks down and sighs)*

**Nick:** *(slowly takes a sip of his coffee and seems concerned)* Well. Can I *(hesitates)* um get you some coffee or something?

**Nancy:** Oh, I am alright. Thanks. Looks like the drama class won't be with us any longer.

**Nick:** Emm.

**Nancy:** Yah.

**Nick:** 27 years. It's been 27 years since you started the course.

**Nancy:** I know. 27 years of teaching this drama class. Over 100 different sections of the class.

**Nick:** This was the only class, the only class of its kind with drama, story, conversations, movement, and imagination in the program.

*(Nancy nods)*

**Nick:** What did you tell them?

**Nancy:** Well, I just told them, you know, how much students have been enjoying it, how much we loved teaching it, and how it could foster students' fluency, engagement and

confidence to speak. I told them what we've learned from working with students on a daily basis over the last 27 years as an instructor about the positive—

**Nick:** Impact! The impact that drama can bring, right?

**Nancy:** *(looks at her classroom across the hallway)* Exactly?

**Nick:** What did they say?

**Nancy:** *(resigned)* They told me that they had saved the drama class for me for more than 25 years in spite of all the changes to the programs.

**Nick:** Saved it for you. It was not for you. *(turns to students chatting across the hallway)* It was for students, for student enriched learning.

**Nancy:** Well, I know the school has been trying to reform the program, also for students. They want to develop it as more academic and more structured. They think that I shouldn't be afraid of change.

**Nick:** Afraid of change? What change? Change for whom?

*(Nancy sighs)*

**Nick:** You know this is not about being afraid of change! This is about taking away a unique learning opportunity from students you and I know from our hearts, the learning that has been offered to hundreds of students over numerous years as one powerful way of learning and experiencing languages. *(pauses)* We know it works.

**Nancy:** Well, *(still looks at the classroom across the hallway)* honestly, *(pauses)* I felt resigned, just resigned. They don't think there is room for courses like the drama class. I couldn't say a word. I didn't know how to respond when I was told that learning outcomes of the drama class are not measurable, not in line with the direction of the skill-oriented academic programs.

**Nick:** Why don't both of us talk to the school again to reconsider the—?

**Nancy:** (*shakes her head*) I doubt it'll have any impact. The decision won't change. I don't know how to describe in words how I feel, but I feel kind of a bit disheartened, thinking this term might be the last term for the course. Too bad but we won't be able to give them the same experience any more.

**Nick:** I know.

**Nancy:** (*checks the time*) I should get going. I have a class at 1.

**Nick:** All right. Take care Nancy!

#### **SCENE 4: Teacher' Office**

(*Nancy sits in the sofa and looks through letters and documents in a dusty box. She picks up and reads a card from her previous students.*)

**Mary:** I really like Nancy. I like how she teaches. I learned about acting. Sometimes during the class, I can act another person, so kind of dream come true because I was interested in going to acting school....so not real me stay in this class.

(*A soundtrack of a previous lesson plays in the background; the soundtrack captures a scene where Mary performed in one drama activity in front of the class.*)

(*Nancy continues to read card messages from Miyuki and others.*)

**Miyuki:** I think you are the best teacher. You always tried to relieve my shyness. You gave me power to speak English even though I used wrong grammar, but I learned trying to speak is important. I don't feel nervous speaking English any more, it is a big deal for me.

**Yuna:** Thank you for the course. I could improve my English skills. With the course, I could enjoy my school life. I was happy to meet this class.

(*Nick knocks on the door and takes a seat across from Nancy.*)

**Nick:** What are those? Look like cards from your students?

**Nancy:** Yeah. This one is from the class about 2 years ago. I remember these guys. Cool kids.

**Nick:** Can I take a look? *(reads the card)* Wow, I can tell they really had a good time. *(He picks up another card from the box).* How about this one?

*(a sound track of another lesson plays; the soundtrack captures students' lively conversations and laughter in groups)*

**Naka:** Thanks for your sense of humour, the atmosphere of the class was always good. You never made fun of students' mistakes, but helped us find fun in making mistakes. We felt free to make mistakes in your class. I was happy talking and acting with my classmates.

**Nancy:** I was also happy with these guys, too. *(notices a thank you card in Nick's hand)* What is in your hand?

**Nick:** *(smiles)* Well, I'm not as popular as you, but I've also just got a card from the class this term. We just had lunch all together after our last class this morning.

*(a sound track of Nick's lesson plays; the energetic voice of Nick announcing the beginning of the Christmas drama performance of the students to the public audience with music in the background is captured in the soundtrack)*

**Maggie:** I feel sad because some of my classmates will leave. I also feel sad that the class is over. This session is special. Nick, I appreciated you. You gave us a lot of opportunities to learn. You are fun, and every time you led us through an attractive class and boosted our motivation.

**Sally:** I don't wanna say goodbye. I will just say thank you. I am really glad to meet you and all my classmates. Also, I will not forget everything. So I want to tell I am thankful to everyone.

*(another soundtrack of Nick's class lesson plays; the soundtrack captures the sound of students' group work on making a story to perform)*

**David:** Thank you everyone for the nice time I've had here with you guys. I'll never forget this memory. Thanks and See you again.

### **SCENE 5: Cafeteria**

*(Nancy waits in line to order at a cafeteria and finds Ben, her former student, standing in front of her.)*

**Nancy:** *(taps on Ben's shoulder)* Hey, you must be Ben.

**Ben:** *(Looks back)* Uh, *(smiling)* Oh hi Nancy.

**Nancy:** How are you Ben? Here for lunch?

**Ben:** Yes. You too?

**Nancy:** Yeah, I often come here for a quick bite. They've got some good sandwiches.

**Ben:** I know. Also they are cheap too.

**Nancy:** Oh, it is your turn to order.

*(both pick up their order and find a table together)*

**Ben:** *(takes a sip of his coffee)* So, do you have any plans for a Christmas break?

**Nancy:** *(takes a big bite of her sandwich)* Well, I am planning to go to a concert before I fly away to my sister's place in North Carolina for Christmas.

**Ben:** Concert? *(smiles and speaks in a teasing tone)* I know what concert you will go to. Steve's, right?

**Nancy:** Hahaha. You got it! I am his big fan, and this will be his 14<sup>th</sup> concert I see. How about you?

**Ben:** Wow, 14th! Well, I don't have special plans. I will probably live in the library. I've got a TOEFL exam coming next month.

**Nancy:** Oh, well, it doesn't sound as exciting as mine. *(smiles)* Good luck with it. Make sure you take some breaks though!

**Ben:** Yeah, *(smiles)* I'll try. By the way, thank you for the class. I really enjoyed it. I didn't want to miss your class even once.

**Nancy:** Thank you. I am glad that you enjoyed it. I enjoyed teaching that class as well.

**Ben:** Actually I took the class because a friend of mine who took your class a few years ago recommended it to me. Now I understand why he did. In fact, I've also recommended another friend of mine who is looking for a class next term.

**Nancy:** I am flattered. *(puts down her coffee cup)* But unfortunately the drama class won't be offered next term.

**Ben:** Really? You are taking a vacation next term?

**Nancy:** No, I will be here, but teaching different courses. *(Sighs lightly)* The thing is that the school will change its program, and some courses including the drama class won't be offered anymore.

**Ben:** *(disappointed)* That's too bad because I really like that class.

## **SCENE 6: Bus Stop**

*(Ben finds Yuki waiting for a bus to downtown.)*

**Ben:** Hey, Yuki!

**Yuki:** Hi Ben. How are you?

**Ben:** Good. You going downtown?

**Yuki:** Yah, I've got to go shopping for souvenirs to bring to Japan.

**Ben:** I see. *(looks to where buses are coming from)* When are you going back to Japan?

**Yuki:** *(also checks if buses are coming)* Soon in about two weeks.

**Ben:** That's very soon. Are you coming to the farewell dinner this Saturday?

**Yuki:** Of course. I can't miss it. Do you know if everyone is coming?

**Ben:** I know some of us can't come as they are leaving tomorrow, but hopefully everyone else will.

**Yuki:** How about Nancy?

**Ben:** She said that she can't make it as she's already booked a flight for Steve's concert in Toronto this weekend.

**Yuki:** (*with a smile*) She really likes Steve.

**Ben:** Yah, I just ran into her at the cafeteria this afternoon, and she looked excited about the concert. Ah, by the way, have you heard about the drama class?

**Yuki:** What about it?

**Ben:** Nancy told me that the drama class won't be offered any more. Our class will be the last one.

**Yuki:** Last one? Really? Why?

**Ben:** I don't know, but it looks like the program will change.

**Yuki:** Nancy must be sad.

**Ben:** Yah, I think so.

**Yuki:** I feel sad too. I really had a great time in the class. It made me really interested in learning English. I also felt like more confident about myself.

**Ben:** You know what? I feel the same way. It's too bad if we would have to be the last students of the class.

**Yuki:** Is there anything we can do to keep the course in the program as students?

**Ben:** Maybe not. You know it's the school's decision, and we are just students.

**Yuki:** (*resigned*) Maybe so.

## **ACT II: TENSIONS**

**SCENE 7: Farewell Dinner**

*(Students from the drama course get together for dinner. With music and noise in the background, the students talk about the class.)*

**Joe:** Good to be together, everyone! I can't believe the term is already over. Time went by so fast. I really enjoyed our class. I met a lot of friends *(shyly)* like you guys in this class. This class was different from other classes.

**Mimi:** Joe, I remember your funny dance. When I saw you the first time in the class, I thought you were a very quiet person, but your acting and dancing was very funny.

**Joe:** Dancing? *(smiles)* Ah, I remember it. You are talking about the newscast scene with Amy, right?

**Mimi:** Yep, right. I think it was with Amy!

**Amy:** I remember it too. *(smiles)* It was our first performance. I remember we had to make a story about a man who couldn't control himself. I think I was interviewing Joe on TV and something ridiculous happened to you. Joe was so funny. I remember we were nervous and confused when we were preparing for the performance. It was our first time to make a story and perform it in English. We were like, "how can we do this?" Then I remember, Joe, you just said "Let us just ad lib." We both felt shy and embarrassed, but we did a really good job. After that, I felt like it is not too difficult to do it.

**Joe:** Yah, making a story was always very difficult. Actually, I am very very shy. I felt very nervous when I performed in front of the class, but I thought to myself, let's just do this. And I could become someone else, and I somehow felt fine to speak.

**Yuki:** Me too. I don't know why, but if I can change to someone, I feel like I can say everything. I am shy, but if I can be a different person, I have courage and then I can say.

**Eva:** Courage is something the drama class taught me too. In the beginning of my study here at the school, I set my goal as speaking like a native speaker. I really tried to participate actively in the class. The drama class gave me lots of opportunities to speak.



I don't think I have become like a native speaker, but (*pauses and smiles*) I feel more brave as an English speaker.

**Nari:** I know what you mean. For me, I found role-playing helpful in developing communication skills. Although I am not sure how much, but I think my English skills have improved than before.

**Steve:** As you know, in the class, we didn't have enough time to think in our first language and we became more nervous. I think it was a good practice for us.

**Mimi:** You are right. In the drama class, I didn't have to think too carefully. In drama, it's like someone said something, I had to say something as soon as I heard. We have almost no thinking time.

**Ben:** I feel the same way. You know, speaking needs confidence. This class and the teacher help us relax. Although we are afraid of grammar rules, we were encouraged to say what we would want to say. Nancy always encouraged us to speak freely. If she said that we are wrong and need to say certain way, then it would not be good for us especially because many of us don't have too much experience to talk in English. We need to grow our confidence.

**Joe:** Interesting! Personally, that's how I felt about the course too. You know I always wanted to get rid of my fear of speaking English (*pauses and smiles shyly*) I am too shy to communicate with native speakers of English.

**Sam:** Whether you believe it or not, I am very shy, too. To learn to speak English, I also wanted to break that shyness. I thought the drama class could help me break my shyness. By the way, you know what? To be honest, although I now appreciate the course, in the first class, I wanted to change the course because I wasn't sure whether the course would be helpful. But later I decided to give a chance to this class. Now I think I made a right decision. I was really very happy in the class. I noticed my confidence has improved.

**Helen:** That's interesting, Sam, because I also wanted to drop the drama class at first. Actually, at first I tried to change the class because I thought it was unsuitable for me,

but I failed to change the class. However, I'm really happy to stay in this class. If I had changed the class, definitely I would have regretted.

**Sam:** Oh, I see. (*smiles*) We were thinking about the same thing in the first week.

**Helen:** Haha. Yah, I am glad that we all ended up staying. I really came to like the class even more towards the end. I really wanted to act something with you all more.

**Maki:** Yah, Helen, I remember how actively you participated in the drama scenes. For me, doing drama was also so fun. Especially, do you remember the court trial? I really enjoyed the court trial. If someone asks me to evaluate the course, I would gladly give 10 out of 10 points to the class.

**Sara:** For me, what was unique about this drama class was that there was the pressing urgency to say something in English. There was always a kind of pressure to perform. If I forget something, I can't stop. I have to say something. I have to use my brain to produce something to keep the story going during the performance. Especially the pressure was higher when we were performing to outside audiences. For example I remember how nervous I was when we performed our Halloween story.

**Sharon:** I also remember that. Oh, I was so nervous before the performance. I was embarrassed that I would have to perform to higher-level students and other teachers. That was my first experience to act in English in front of big audiences. But when I heard people laughing during our performance, I felt like "oh, this is not difficult." I could overcome my fear.

**Hemi:** I know what you mean. I was scared during our performance, but I felt good when we were finished.

**Sara:** After that kind of performance, I kind of felt like, how can I say? It's difficult to explain in English, but it felt like growing.

**Sharon:** Mmmm, growing. Mmm. Yah, right. Maybe I understand what you mean. At first I didn't like performing in English, but it was kind of interesting how I felt after performances. It was like really uncomfortable but kind of comfortable.

## **SCENE 8: I Liked It, But I Didn't Like It**

*(Esther and Yuki sit at a student lounge in the school and chat with their classmates from the previous drama class.)*

**Esther:** Thanks, guys, for your time. As you know at the farewell party, some of us talked about writing a letter to the school to keep the drama class. Hopefully we can send this soon to the school. Many of us have already put down their names to support this letter. You guys mentioned that you'd like some more time to think on this, and *(hesitatingly)* we were wondering if we could get your support too.

**Yuki:** Some of us have already left Canada, so we won't be able to get everyone's support, but with you, we would then include almost all in the letter. *(looks at Jane and others)* Can you—

**Jane:** Not me. As you know, I didn't want to participate even in Won's research. I don't also wanna be part of this.

**Esther:** Well, I know you didn't consent to Won's research, but this is not about his research. You know this is about whether we can keep this fun class for our friends and other future students.

**Jane:** Fun class? It wasn't for me. Sorry, I just don't want to be part of anything. I didn't like everything about this class. I like the teacher, but it wasn't the class I wanted from the beginning. Sorry, but I think I should get going. Good luck with it.

*(Jane leaves abruptly. The students sit in awkward silence.)*

**Esther:** Well, I guess we should respect her decision.

*(some nod)*

**Michael:** Speaking of decision, to tell the truth, I wasn't sure if I made a right decision about the course. Actually in the midterm, I thought I mischose the class. My friends in the other classes told me that they studied how to make conversations or presentations, and they do it individually but in this class, the main way to study English was through acting with others. Umm, it was too much group work. I thought my friends in other

classes improved their English more. From the midterm, I thought if I pass this class, I would like to move to an academic class. In there, I would do a presentation individually. In this drama class, I felt I relied on other students too much, so I felt it wasn't good for me.

**Yuki:** What do you mean you relied on others too much?

**Michael:** Sometimes I didn't know what and how to say, and then I relied on others and asked them to speak. But in the academic or other general classes, students can't rely on others. I think I will get more confidence if I don't rely on others.

**Esther:** Yah, individual work is helpful for your English, but you know group work is also useful especially in improving one's fluency in speaking. In the drama class, we made a story and perform it together. Whether you want it or not, we had to participate with others and produce something. I think it gave us a little bit of pressure, but a good pressure we could enjoy I think.

**Michael:** I know but don't we do group work in other classes too!

**Esther:** It is a bit different in this class though. Group work is usually little and short. It is often just to share our opinions rather than we actually do something. You know but in this class we should create something and act it out.

**Morrie:** Mmmm, I agree with you. In group work in the drama class, everybody brings some ideas. It is a collaborative work.

**Michael:** (*not convinced*) I understand, but I don't feel like this class benefitted me much.

**Momo:** (*turns to Michael, nodding*) Honestly, I have to agree with Michael. I think this class could be good for some students, but not for me. I didn't like this class at all. I don't feel that my English has improved in this class. The only time I liked was when we went to the lab and did listening exercises. I felt that in the class, we didn't learn anything new. I felt the whole class depended on your own language. I would like to learn more new words, pronunciation, and spelling, and do more practice in the lab. I felt like I really improved so much after each lab time.

**Kona:** I kind of hear you Momo. Personally I like the teacher and had fun in the class. However, I don't feel like it's helped my English. Sometimes, I wasn't sure and wanted to know what the objective of each activity was. I wish we we'd done more grammar and more vocabulary exercises.

**Esther:** Well, but I think this class helped us to communicate with other people in different situations. We were encouraged to talk without worrying about errors. Don't you like that I could move my body when I spoke to other people. I felt freer. Well, Nick always said, just talk. "It doesn't matter your grammar is right or wrong." Didn't you feel like you've learned to be free about your speaking through this class?

**Michael:** Yah, this may be good for those students with no confidence in speaking. I think I've gained confidence too from this class. But if one wants to work on your English seriously, well, I don't think I would recommend this course.

**Sharon:** Mmm but wasn't this class more enjoyable than other classes? Some of my friends told me that they said that their classes are a little bit boring because they do the same things almost everyday like small conversations and listening to a teacher or textbook CD, the same thing everyday. But in this class, we did something different everyday. We were talking, laughing, listening to and watching others.

**Maggie:** Yah yah, it's interesting. My friends also said the same thing. They were envious of us. They told me like, "Your class looks so fun."

**Morrie:** Yah, (*nods but not fully convinced*) I enjoyed it too. I feel I learned something from the class although I am not sure what it was. But for me, I was expecting more for myself from the class. I mean, my friends in other general classes seem to learn more vocabulary. I don't think we learned lots of vocabs.

**Yuki:** Morrie, I am just curious. Would you then register for this class again if you had a choice?

**Morrie:** If I could choose again? mmm. Well, (*hesitatingly*) maybe yes. Maybe no. I was very shy and afraid of speaking, but I feel less afraid now. I think I agree with Michael in

that if one is too shy in speaking, this is the best class to break his shyness to speak freely. But if he doesn't have this problem, he or she can go to other classes.

**Yuki:** Mmm. I see.

**Morrie:** Plus, If I could suggest, I thought maybe we could do more acting but in another way. We can use already made scripts because making a scenario was difficult. We were always concerned about a scenario. We had two kinds of stress: how to act out and what to act out. With a scripted play, we can reduce the stress and focus on how to act or say.

**Esther:** (*turns to Maggie, Juna, and Lexi, who are from another section*) What about you guys? Would you support our petition for the course? I know you all had a great time in the drama class.

**Maggie:** Yes, we did. However, (*hesitatingly*) I am not sure if I would want to support the letter. To be honest, (*pauses briefly*) um, I like the course, but also at the same time I didn't like it much. I think we could have had more intensive listening exercise. We usually focused on making a story, performing, and having a conversation, so we didn't have opportunities for general listening. You know we had a final listening test. But I didn't do well on the test.

**Juna:** Yah, I think it might be good to have more intensive listening exercises, but (*confused*) I am not sure, but I also have to say that kind of class might be boring. Well, I know we need listening exercise, but at the same time it is also boring.

**Lexi:** (*hesitatingly*) Mmmm. Well, even though this class is interesting, we can perhaps combine an academic class and a drama class. I think it is better.

**Yuki:** It's interesting that you all three liked the course but was also not satisfied with it. Just out of my curiosity, if you were to evaluate the course out of 10 points, what would you give?

**Juna, Maggie, and Lexi:** (*after some hesitation, they all say together*) five maybe?

## SCENE 9: Conference Presentation Room

*(The researcher, Won, stands back in front of a conference audience. He is about to end his presentation.)*

**Won:** Thank you for listening. What we all auditorily witnessed here today was the voices of the students, the teachers, and the researcher in these particular drama-based ESL classes that this artistic, ethnographically-informed, and engaging radio drama play has aimed to foster and empower. I hope that this play has helped you gain a more contextual and engaged understanding of an auditory narrative version of what the researcher experienced and how students described and reacted to what they experienced in the classes with educational drama. This radio drama play was also meant to serve as an invitation for a wider audience of L2 scholars and practitioners to hear a version(s) of the soundscape of the given drama-based classes (especially when it gets auditorily produced or performed on stage) and generates multiple interpretations of the implications and challenges of a drama-based L2 pedagogy by comparing with and reflecting on their own teaching contexts.

Above all, this was a story about the classes with educational drama-based pedagogy where the students exercised spontaneous freedom and right to speak, created stories and performed them. This was also a story about the two teachers, Nancy and Nick, who believed in the power of educational drama in creating a space to exercise students' imagination and creativity, foster fluency and confidence, and promote the joy of learning in collaboration. It was also a story about the students who came to realize the joy of learning and using language as a more confident language user and meaning maker after being introduced to alternative ways of learning and experiencing language. Conversely, by telling the story about the closure of the class, this theatrical text also presents how the ESL instruction with educational drama was differently received by different students. The text brings to light the tension that was present within an individual student, among different understandings of learning, and between different curricular expectations. In that sense, this was also a story about tensions in conflicting beliefs, attitudes, and ideas surrounding the educational practice of drama-based L2 pedagogy. For example, drama-based activities necessitated different kinds of participation in class practices than teacher-fronted conventional instruction. That is, as opposed to being passive information recipients, the students were invited to be active participants/meaning makers/performers. Such repositioning created a tension within some students like Sharon who felt it took courage to participate as she said "it [performing] was like really uncomfortable, but kind of comfortable." The tension also existed among the students because of the differences in the ways students

theorize learning. Some students viewed learning from a transmission model of learning perspective and thus valued less the affordances of participatory, less structured, creative, and student-centered educational drama. The tension was extended to how drama-based pedagogy and other general creative non-academic courses are valued differently by the program in the face of a pedagogical effort towards a more academic, structured, and outcome-oriented curriculum, leading to the discontinuation of the drama course after two decades of educating the creative minds and linguistic competencies of hundreds of students. Today, this rare English language course with educational drama remains closed. In fact, all other so called specialized courses at the school which included arts-informed approaches, such as drama, creative writing, and storytelling, have been removed from the course list of both the intensive and academic language programs. It is my hope that—

*(there is an abrupt question from an audience member.)*

**audience member:** Sorry to interrupt, but could I ask a question? I am sorry that the drama class was closed, but why does it have to be a drama class? As some students mentioned in your study, some students need to take a test after all. All some need may be a certificate. What they learned in the drama class can also be taught in general skill-oriented classes too, perhaps even in more efficient, structured, and systematic ways.

**Won:** Thanks for your question. Perhaps several of you may resonate with the question. The story I told in this presentation does not intend to argue that drama-based pedagogy is the only or best way to develop skills, competencies, knowledge, and practices of a second language to our students. What is told through the story in this presentation is how I believe that educational drama, which is multi-modal, imaginative, embodied, contextually-sensitive, and engaging in its nature, can be one powerful way to enrich our L2 classrooms in a very specific way, which might not be affordable in other types of L2 classrooms. I want to answer your question by sharing Cummins and Early's (2011) advice where they urge us to think that, in our classrooms, educators are continuously involved in "sketching a triangular set of images: "An image of our identities as educators, an image of the identity options that we highlight for our students, an image of our society that we hope our students will help form in the future" (p. 156). It is my sincere hope that the present auditory account of the possibilities and implications of educational drama for adult language learners can be heard as a



contribution to the ongoing pedagogical discussion on these important questions: What identities are our L2 pedagogies cultivating in our students? What images are we sketching on a daily basis in our classrooms? I hope that my study is recognized as a call to a shared conviction among many scholars that despite adverse and oppressive conditions surrounding our classrooms, it is important that teachers recognize their potential to exercise their agency to restructure classroom interaction in a more democratic and dialogic way and ultimately to make instructional choices that promote what Cummins (2009, 2011) calls collaborative relations of power in our classrooms. I draw this presentation to an end with the hope that the pedagogical effort taken by two local teachers, Nancy and Nick, that we audibly witnessed today can be heard as an example of a small yet significant ground-up pedagogical effort towards creating a collaborative, empowering interpersonal space fostering our students' identities as that of creative, competent, and confident meaning-makers. Thank you.

#### **SCENE 10: Teacher Office**

*(The final line with "thank you" in Scene 9 is a crossover with the previous scene in the teacher office [Scene 4] where Nancy and Nick are reading cards from their students)*

**Esther:** Thank you Nick. I felt you really want to try to help us to participate in the class. So I am very thankful to you. For my classmates, ah . . . well, thank you everybody for being close friends. It hasn't been a very long, but we shared many things, many memories, it was very fun. We laughed a lot. I was very happy with them. In Canada, I see another side of myself. I think this class is the root of my change.

**Nancy:** Wow, that's powerful, Nick.

**Nick:** It kind of saddens me to think that I will no longer be able to be a teacher for the drama course, but I guess *(pauses)* I could still be a language teacher teaching with drama spirit.

**Nancy:** *(closes the card she was reading)* I will miss these guys and a multitude of moments that my students and I had with stories, and drama.

*(the message below is read aloud in the background while a soundtrack of a lesson with students' conversations and scattered laughter plays)*

**Sam:** Oh, thank you so much I am going to miss you and my classmates. I will try to keep in touch with you all. I enjoyed spending time in the class. Everyday we laughed. Everyday was different in the drama class. All these four months, we played to learn English. Thank you all.

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